



The California Tiger Salamander

Prepared by the Sacramento Fish & Wildlife Office

August 2011

CLASSIFICATION: Threatened/Endangered

Central Valley population: Threatened

Sonoma population: Endangered

Santa Barbara population: Endangered



DESCRIPTION

The California tiger salamander is an amphibian in the family Ambystomatidae. It is a large, stocky, terrestrial salamander with a broad, rounded snout. Adult males are about 20 centimeters (8 inches) long, females a little less than 18 centimeters (7 inches).

Coloration consists of white or pale yellow spots or bars on a black background on the back and sides. The belly varies from almost uniform white or pale yellow to a variegated pattern of white or pale yellow and black. The salamander's small eyes, which have black irises, protrude from their heads.

Males can be distinguished from females, especially during the breeding season, by their swollen *cloacae*, a common chamber into which the intestinal, urinary, and reproductive canals discharge. They also have more developed tail fins and, as mentioned above, larger overall size.

California tiger salamanders are primarily terrestrial, spending most of their lives in upland areas, living in burrows made by other creatures. In winter they migrate to breed in natural and artificial pools, ponds, and other seasonal wetland features. In the pools and ponds salamanders lay eggs that hatch into larvae and then metamorphose into terrestrial juveniles that migrate to burrows in uplands for the dry season.

DISTRIBUTION

This species is restricted to California. California tiger salamanders are often restricted to vernal pools and seasonal ponds, including many constructed stock ponds, in grassland and oak savannah plant communities, predominantly from sea level to 2,000 feet, in central California.

In the Coastal region, populations are scattered from Sonoma County in the northern San Francisco Bay Area to Santa Barbara County, and in the Central Valley and Sierra Nevada foothills, they occur from Yolo to Kern counties.

The Sonoma population appears to have been geographically isolated from the remainder of the California tiger salamander population by distance, mountains and major waterway barriers for more than 700,000 years.

THREATS

The primary cause of the decline of California tiger salamander populations is the loss and fragmentation of habitat from human activities and the encroachment of nonnative predators.



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Other threats include hybridization, predation, infection, contaminated runoff, pesticides and reduction of available ground squirrel burrows.